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TO RHOVQHS/COMSEVENTHFLT PRIORITY
INFO RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 7705
RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0467
RUEHKSO/AMCONSUL SAPPORO PRIORITY 0145
RUEHNAG/AMCONSUL NAGOYA PRIORITY 2249
RUEHFK/AMCONSUL FUKUOKA PRIORITY 0133
RUEHNN/AMCONSUL NAHA PRIORITY 0155
RUYNJDK/COMNAVFORJAPAN YOKOSUKA JA PRIORITY
RUYNJMF/NAVCRIMINSERVFO FAREAST YOKOSUKA JA PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY

UNCLAS OSAKA KOBE 000496

SIPDIS

COMSEVENTHFLT PASS TO USS JOHN S. MCCAIN

SENSITIVE

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [MARR](#) [PREL](#) [JA](#)

SUBJECT: POLITICS SHAPE SHIP VISITS TO HIMEJI AND
SAKAIMINATO

¶1. (SBU) Recent visits to Sakaiminato and Himeji by the USS John S. McCain (JSM) in July and August demonstrate the impact of the local political climate on the success and ease of planning of U.S. Navy ship visits in our district. The July 5th launches of ballistic missiles into the Sea of Japan by North Korea added urgency to the Sakaiminato (located on the Sea of Japan, or SOJ) visit and underscored for local leaders and the media the importance of the U.S.-Japan security alliance.

¶2. (SBU) Fueled by an extreme interpretation of the City Assembly's 1975-vintage non-nuclear resolution, interference by Kobe City and elements within the Hyogo Prefecture port bureau increased the hesitancy of Himeji City to cooperate with ConGen staff and detracted from an otherwise excellent port visit by the same crew only a month later. The professionalism of the ship's officers and crew in handling the onboard press conference and providing tours of the ship for VIPs and local press encouraged positive media coverage. Organized protestor opposition was minimal for the USS McCain at both ports, and the Consulate received only a handful of letters of opposition to the visits. In past years the Consulate has received close to 150 letters.

¶3. (SBU) In Sakaiminato, a greater threat perception reduced protestor turnout and improved the cooperation from the city government, police and port authorities. The missile threat effectively neutralized mainstream opposition to the visit arising from Sakaiminato's high volume of trade with the DPRK (highest level of North Korean trade in Japan). The lower threat perception and location an ocean away from the SOJ meant the JSM could not catch the DPRK missile PR windfall in Himeji, and in its place was homegrown opposition to the bilateral naval relationship. A deft handling of the press during both visits by the Commanding Officer (CO) underscored the Navy's understanding of local sensitivities to port visits, the importance of the U.S.-Japan security alliance, and the role the U.S. Navy plays in defending Japan from attack. There was a high level of press interest in the CO's courtesy calls on the Mayor of Sakaiminato, and media stories emphasized themes of

friendship and mutual defense.

14. (SBU) COMMENT: ConGen Osaka-Kobe has facilitated 17 ship visits in the last 10 years, 5 of which have occurred in the last 3 months. Close coordination among the Consulate, CNFJ, and the ship's CO has been instrumental in averting problems and maximizing success. Our experience during the two latest visits to our district by the JSM underlines the importance of paying close attention to how the domestic political situation in a given city will affect cooperation by local authorities. END COMMENT.

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